

WILLIAM TILLINGHAST BULL

By JOHN B. WALKER, M.D., F.A.C.S., New York

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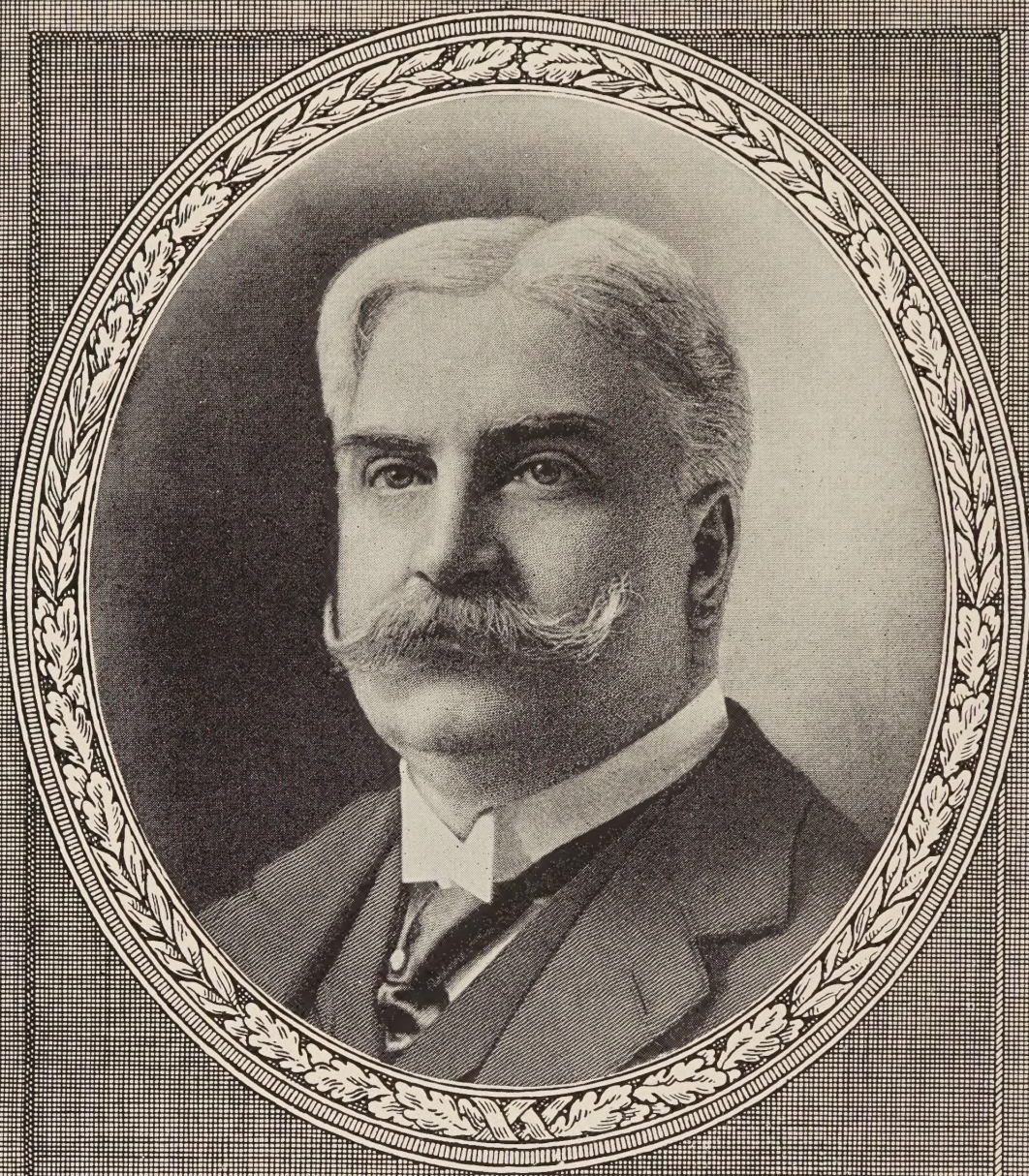
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DOCTOR WILLIAM TILLINGHAST BULL, after facing the inevitable for several months, died in his sixtieth year on February 22, 1909, at Wymberly, Isle of Hope, near Savannah, Georgia, whither but a few weeks before he had gone to obtain the benefit of the sunshine and warmth.

This eminent surgeon, son of Henry and Henrietta Melville Bull, was born in Newport, Rhode Island, May 18, 1849. His first American ancestor was Henry Bull who in 1609 came from Wales with eight other men, the party founding Aquidneck (Newport). The pioneer Bull was a member of the Roger Williams Colony and twice Governor of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations. Land included in his original grant is still in possession of his descendants after a period of over three hundred years. Doctor Bull's paternal grandfather, a distinguished antiquarian, was the author of *Memoirs of Rhode Island*. He lived in the family homestead until his death. Henry Melville, William T. Bull's maternal grandfather, also of Newport, was a student of and authority on Colonial history.

William Tillinghast Bull was graduated with honors from Harvard College, receiving the degree A.B. in 1869, in his twentieth year. Three years later, in 1872, he received the degree of M.D. from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, now the School of Medicine of Columbia University. In the same year the degree of A.M. was conferred on him by his Alma Mater, he having taken, simultaneously with his medical studies, the course leading to this degree. The faculty prize of the College of Physicians and Surgeons was awarded to Dr. Bull for his thesis on Perityphilitis (Appendicitis), his researches on this subject being inspired by the work of his teacher, Dr. Henry B. Sands, whose attainments in technique were a potent factor in the improvement of the surgical treatment of appendicitis.

After serving as interne at Bellevue Hospital for the full term of a year and a half, Dr. Bull went to Europe for further study in his profession. Although well versed in the best American surgical methods, his alert mind detected the vulnerable points in his training. Thus his impartial attitude toward other schools allowed him to recognize and benefit by their advantages. In Germany he applied himself to the study of surgical pathology. In France, under the guidance of

Farabeuf, he studied the superior operative technique of the French surgeons founded upon detailed anatomical knowledge. Later he went to England and Scotland. He was decidedly influenced by the sound common sense of the English school, and early became a follower of Lister of Edinburgh.

After two years of European study, Dr. Bull returned to America determined to devote himself solely to the practice of surgery. This plan did not receive the encouragement of his elder colleagues, for at that time the practice of surgery and the practice of medicine were united in the hands of the general, or family, physician. But, with characteristic independence, the young surgeon nevertheless held to his determination to specialize in surgery. Well equipped with the training he had received in the various schools, endowed with well balanced surgical judgment and fine courageous spirit, he was able to carry through his plans with signal success.

On his return from Europe in 1875 Dr. Bull became house surgeon to the New York Dispensary; in 1876 he was appointed surgeon-in-chief to the Chambers Street Hospital (House of Relief, department of New York Hospital), a position which he held for eleven years (1877-1888). In 1879-1880 he was assistant demonstrator of anatomy in the College of Physicians and Surgeons; in 1880-1883, demonstrator of anatomy and adjunct professor of surgery. In 1888 he was appointed full professor—professor of practice of surgery and clinical surgery. In 1880 he was appointed visiting surgeon to the St. Luke's Hospital. In 1883 he was appointed attending surgeon to the New York Hospital and continued in that capacity until May, 1900, when he was appointed consulting surgeon to the institution.

Believing that a surgeon could not at the same time fulfill the demands made by two hospital services, Dr. Bull resigned from St. Luke's in 1883, and was made consulting surgeon there. In 1900 he was appointed attending surgeon to Roosevelt Hospital and continued in this capacity until 1908. He was also attending surgeon to the Hospital for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled from 1879 to 1909; consulting surgeon to the Manhattan Hospital, Orthopedic Hospital and Dispensary, New York Cancer, now General Memorial Hospital; Woman's, and States Emigrants Hospitals; and also to the Newport, Rhode Island, Hospital. He was a trustee and vice president of the General Memorial Hospital.

One of Dr. Bull's outstanding gifts was his marvelous skill in teaching. This was attested by his great popularity in the class room where his many pupils were fired by enthusiasm both for the man himself and the subjects taught. Dr. Bull early established a reputation by his epochal work in gunshot wounds of the intestine and in appendicitis. During his service at Chambers Street Hospital, a woman brought in with two gunshot wounds of the intestine died without operation shortly after admission. At the autopsy Dr. Bull became convinced that

her life could have been saved had suture of the intestines been performed. An opportunity to put his theory into practice soon arose when a man was brought in with a similar injury. Dr. Bull operated upon him successfully. Dr. Bull's methods in laparotomy were widely copied. He was a true surgeon—the worker with intelligent, trained mind, skillful hand, and high unwearied zeal in his chosen work.

Not often conspicuous in society meetings, when he spoke it was with authority. Contributions to medical literature from Dr. Bull's pen were numerous, not only under his own name, but also in collaboration with his colleagues. He was a member of the Harvard, University, Century, Strollers, and Racquet and Tennis Clubs; of the American Surgical Association, The New York Academy of Medicine, The New York Surgical Society, Société Internationale de Chirurgie, and several other European surgical societies.

Dr. Bull's final illness began in April, 1908, when a glandular enlargement of the neck was observed. Operation followed when the growth was found to be malignant. On his return from Newport in the autumn of 1908, he had failed so rapidly that his closest friends knew that his remaining span of life was short, but with it all his cheerfulness and optimism never failed. On January 20, 1909, he was taken to Savannah, Georgia, but the temporary improvement which followed was but a flaring up of the flame before it was extinguished, and he died February 22, 1909.

Dr. Bull was a man apart from the multitude both physically and mentally. Nature had endowed him with her richest gifts. He was strikingly handsome. Not only was he a clever diagnostician, a cool, deft and skilled operator, but he was pre-eminently the patient's friend. To him the patient as an individual was far more important than the patient as a case. Courageous operator though he was, he knew when not to operate.

The moderation of his fees was noteworthy. Loyalty to friends, generous acknowledgment of the attainments of others, kindly consideration for all with whom he came in contact and inexhaustible sympathy won for him the devotion of men and women of all classes. He possessed complete self reliance and poise without conceit. As has been well said, he was near to the heart of the great community in which he lived. His death brought sorrow to the tenements, to the mansions of the rich, to obscure wage earners, to the leaders of the country's best thought.

One of Dr. Bull's most noted contemporaries declared that at the end of his own life he could ask for no greater tribute than was paid to the great surgeon at his funeral services. For in that large cosmopolitan gathering in which were assembled the young and the old, the powerful and the weak, the well known and the unknown, every individual, united in a common sorrow, mourned the loss of a friend and helper in time of need.

